

# Let's Teach Emotional Regulation

(from The Bounce Back Book: Building Resiliency Skills in Your Preschooler – Alberta Mental Health Board)

The parent-child/ caregiver-child relationship plays a significant role in the development of emotional regulation in toddlers. All children need adults to help them learn how to deal with their thoughts and feelings. Modeling a positive and supportive attitude, expressing negative emotions appropriately and providing a consistent daily routine will help your child better manage his or her emotions. By learning and practicing these things as adults we can help children learn positive ways of dealing with emotions that may be overwhelming.

Emotional Regulation is how you manage your emotions and ensure you act appropriately and responsibly. Children's understanding of emotions grow as they do. At age two toddlers start to understand that other people can have different feelings than they do. By age three they begin to realize that feelings exist in the past and future as well as the present. By age four they begin to understand and experience positive and negative feelings about others. As well, preschoolers begin to be able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality.

It is important for children to learn how to manage their emotions, so they can develop successful interpersonal skills. This will help them have healthy, positive peer relationships as children and adults, and will prepare them for the social aspect of school.

## Calm Down Tips for Parents and Caregivers

(From Calm Down Time by Elizabeth Verdick)

**Stay Calm.** When a child hits, throws a tantrum, or melts down, it's not only an expression of emotion but a call for your help. The calmer you are, the calmer the toddler will feel. Keep your voice steady, low, and matter-of-fact. Get down to the child's level and make eye contact when you talk.

**Show empathy.** Put an arm around the child or hold her hand. Acknowledge how she feels: "You look frustrated. It's okay to feel that way." When you name the feelings you see, the child begins to learn to name them too.

**Help solve the problem.** Something caused the frustration – you can help fix it. Rebuild a fallen block tower together or help a child to ask a friend to give back the toy that was taken. If a child has hit, help the victim first. Then calmly tell the other child, "Hands are not for hitting – hitting hurts." Encourage the child to apologize.

**Have a cozy calm-down area.** Add a beanbag chair or comfy pillows. Keep blankets and stuffed animals handy. Explain that this is a place for taking breaks to calm down.

**Be nearby.** Calm-down time is not meant to punish or isolate a young child. Some children need to be hugged, held and soothed during tantrums; others don't want to be touched. See what works in each situation – but always stay close by and keep the child safe.

**Help end the break.** Eventually children wind down and feel ready to return to play. Help reinforce the positive nature of breaks by saying, "You feel better now. You helped yourself calm down!" Ask if the child is ready to rejoin or needs more time to calm down. After the break, offer hugs, high fives, and smooth the transition into a new activity.

**Teach and practice calm-down tools.** During quiet moments when no one is upset, show children how to breathe deeply to relax. Say, "Let's watch our bellies get bigger while we breathe." Together, close your eyes and talk about feeling peaceful. Play soothing music and hum or sing along. Show a child how to hug his shoulders with his arms or rock slowly back and forth to help calm down the body.

**Redirect.** Before young children explode like little volcanoes, try stepping in quickly with a favorite toy, book, or other object to refocus their attention. Even before that, keep an eye out to make sure toddlers' basic needs are being met. Is the child hungry, thirsty, bored, tired, anxious, or overstimulated? Staying on top of those needs is a first line of defense.

### **What is Mindfulness?**

Being mindful means paying attention to the present moment, which will help to calm your mind and body, so you can find peace and happiness within yourself. Mindfulness can be practiced by taking walks, breathing, or meditating. By being mindful you'll be able to better understand your emotions and worries and process overwhelming emotions (emotional regulation). Awareness of the world around you will also help you to have a positive attitude and be more compassionate.

## **Other activities:**

### *Sensory Bottles with Liquid*

- These can be used for calming, descriptive language or science discovery to name a few. The options are endless! This can be used with children of all ages. A calm down sensory bottle can be used to help calm a child when their emotions become overwhelming. They can also be used by an adult learning to meditate. Focusing on the objects in the calm down jar will help a child calm down and focus their attention.

#### **Liquid Options– Choose 1:**

Water  
Baby Oil  
Cooking Oil & Water  
Liquid soap  
Shampoo  
Corn Syrup  
Hair Gel (helps items stay put)

#### **Directions:**

Add the liquid to a bottle with a lid. You can use just the liquid for the children to shake up, you can add sparkles, letters, beads, buttons, themed items such as ocean animals or magnets in baby oil (other solutions can rust magnets). Talk to your children about what they see or you can comment on it, especially if they are too young.

### *Bubbles (from The Bounce Back Book: Building Resiliency Skills in Your Preschooler)*

- Breathing exercises are a classic calming and relaxation technique. Relaxation is one way to help manage emotions. Preschoolers are capable of learning controlled breathing. Bubble blowing can help children learn how to breathe deeply.

#### Homemade bubble solution:

- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons glycerin (found in the baking aisle)
- 4 tablespoons dishwashing liquid
- Bubble wands – purchased at local discount store, use straws, or be creative and make your own!
- *Let solution sit overnight before use.*